Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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2007-02964/

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Log Number: 07-16-72
Week of April 16, 2007

FORAGE AND BEEF WEBSITE ZEROES IN ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A website originally created as a "living library" of research and extension information for beef and forage producers has taken a turn for the greener.

The website, www.foragebeef.ca, now contains a great deal of material on climate change among the regular features and helpful tidbits it has always offered cattle producers.

Many see the addition of a "green" component as a natural fit for the website. There are clear links between agriculture and the environment, which are particularly strong in the forage and beef sectors.

Information has been developed into two new modules found on the site, entitled "Climate Change–Beef" and "Climate Change–Forage." Both modules provide readers with a summary of data in the form of "Knowledge Nuggets," as well as fact sheets and scientific papers outlining research done on the forage and beef industry as it relates to greenhouse gas emissions.

Attention to environmental issues is growing, and www.foragebeef.ca offers some interesting facts and useful advice to farmers in this area. For example, feeding better quality diets that include legumes rather than grasses will not only reduce the amount of feed required per animal, but also reduce the methane those animals produce and release in the digestion process. The result is a more efficient feeding regime that lowers the producer's maintenance costs per animal, but is also friendlier to the environment.

"New topics are placed on the website all the time," said Al Foster, a Forage Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF). "It's one that producers should have bookmarked. They'll find it to be a good summary of information on a number of forage and beef related topics."

The website has been developed by several supporting partners, including the Alberta Beef Producers, the Canada Alberta Beef Research Centre, the Saskatchewan Agriculture Development Fund, Agriculture Alberta, SAF, Manitoba Agriculture, and the Matching Investment Initiatives Fund of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).

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The construction of www.foragebeef.ca took several years and involved over 50 AAFC research scientists, university researchers, and provincial forage and beef cattle extension specialists from across Canada. The group came together with the goal of bringing agricultural research closer to Canadian farmers. Their efforts have not gone unrewarded, netting them a major national AAFC award.

Foster says the wealth of knowledge, dedication, and hard work put into this project has paid off.

"The website provides producers with one stop for forage and beef information. It also includes updated news topics and announcements of things happening in the agricultural sector in and around Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba," he noted.

"It's important for Saskatchewan producers to view these updates regularly."

Foster says producers will find the website has many valuable features. "A user-friendly internal search engine allows for quick and easy access to the wide variety of information on the site. As well, information is summarized in a logical outline and is easy to follow," he explained.

"New topics and recent research papers from the majority of Canadian forage and beef cattle research scientists are being added all the time, so www.foragebeef.ca is always a quick reference for subjects that producers are interested in."

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NON-BLOATING LEGUMES REDUCE RISK IN ALFALFA/GRASS PASTURES

When seeding cultivated land to perennial forage for pasture, producers are sometimes reluctant to include alfalfa in the seed mix because of the risk of bloat.

However, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Forage Development Specialist Lorne Klein, there are some non-bloating legumes such as sainfoin and cicer milkvetch that can help producers deal with that risk.

"The advantage of including alfalfa with grass is the opportunity to reduce the need for nitrogen fertilizer on your pasture," said Klein. "Studies have shown that alfalfa/grass combinations without nitrogen fertilizer will produce forage yields equal to pure grass stands receiving 35 to 150 pounds per acre of nitrogen fertilizer."

The good news is that producers can get the lion's share of the legume advantage even if they just have 40 per cent alfalfa in their pasture stand. They don't need to graze the full 100 per cent alfalfa.

One strategy to reduce the risk of bloat is to include non-bloating legumes in the seed mix, along with alfalfa and grass.

Sainfoin is a relatively early growing legume, and is suggested for pastures where early season grazing is planned. A suggested seeding rate for a pasture mix is 10 pounds per acre sainfoin, one pound per acre alfalfa, and four to seven pounds per acre grass.

"The nitrogen fixing capability of sainfoin is not well known, so alfalfa in the mix is still recommended for that purpose," said Klein. "The sainfoin will reduce bloat risk, as long as it is consumed with the alfalfa."

Cicer milkvetch is a legume that is slow to start growth in spring, and retains its leaves into late summer and fall. It is therefore better suited for summer and fall grazing.

A suggested seeding rate for a pasture mix is three pounds per acre cicer milkvetch, one pound per acre alfalfa, and four to seven pounds per acre grass.

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"Cicer milkvetch may take three to four years to become established, so the alfalfa is recommended to provide a legume during the first two to three years," Klein noted.

In the spring of 2005, 10 producers throughout Saskatchewan seeded demonstration fields that included sainfoin and cicer milkvetch. These fields were monitored for establishment, and will be followed as the producers use them for grazing. Observations will be used for future recommendations.

For a list of where the demonstration fields are located, please contact Lorne Klein at (306) 848-2382.

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VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING PROVIDES KEY FOR RURAL RENEWAL

The latest census data from Statistics Canada has provided more fuel for the debate about rural revitalization.

While the numbers showed that the overall trend towards urbanization continues, an expert in rural population with the agency says it has little to do with the amount of money flowing through the rural economy.

Statistics Canada Research Economist Ray Bollman's recent report, entitled "Factors Driving Canada's Rural Economy," found that the three fundamental drivers for rural Canada are technology, prices, and demography. His conclusions provide some food for thought for those who believe that rural revitalization is linked to the price of agricultural commodities.

Bollman says commodity industries like agriculture are not likely to be big drivers of rural population increases if the benchmark for success is job growth or population growth.

"The price of machinery is going down relative to the price of labour to do a unit of work, whether that is to make a bale of hay, produce a litre of milk, or cultivate an acre of land. So there is always an incentive there to substitute machines for workers," he said.

"Communities that are intensive in commodities should work towards finding something extra or something new to export, to stabilize their work force, because you need fewer and fewer people to simply produce commodities," said Bollman.

That thought runs counter to those who suggest a more profitable farm economy would result in more rural population. Bollman says more money flowing through a rural economy is not the solution.

"If commodity prices go up, you do not get more workers in communities. If the objective is workers or people, then the change in commodity prices will not have a big impact. I think you might even predict that people would buy bigger machines and you would need even fewer workers," he explained.

Bollman says adding a manufacturing base or value-added processing is one approach that might more effectively create jobs.

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"If you think about a successful rural community 20 years from now, it will likely have a manufacturing base. Successful communities will be those that find a new product or service to export in order to maintain their employment base," he said.

Bollman's report concludes that the falling price of transporting goods will make rural Canada more competitive when it comes to attracting manufacturing and processing. When transportation costs drop, opportunities arise to create jobs in these areas, and jobs create population growth.

That may sound like an overly simple solution, and Bollman admits that may not be the answer for all communities. But he contends that communities that choose to grow will find their way.

"I don't think rural depopulation is inevitable, because no matter how you classify groups of communities or sizes of communities or the major commodity being shipped in the community, there are always some that are growing and some that are declining," he stated.

"It's not inevitable. There is always some community that, through good luck or good management, is able to grow."

Bollman's report, "Factors Driving Canada's Rural Economy," is available through Statistics Canada's website at www.statcan.ca.

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WESTERN CANADIAN LIVESTOCK EXPO RETURNS TO SASKATOON

A prime opportunity is right around the corner for dairy and pork producers to see the latest equipment and products available to help them advance their operations.

The 2007 Western Canadian Livestock Expo will continue to showcase the most recent developments in technology and genetics for both the dairy and pork industries.

The show is being held April 25 and 26 at the Prairieland Park in Saskatoon. It's organized by the Prairieland Park Corporation, and co-sponsored by Sask Pork and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF).

Troy Donauer, a Livestock Development Specialist with SAF, says this year's Expo provides trade show exhibitors, producers, and patrons with expanded marketing and networking opportunities.

"We've done a number of things to try and make the show better. We're offering a free 'Farmyard Lunch' from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on April 25 for all the exhibitors and the people attending to mix and mingle. It's a good networking opportunity for all involved," he said.

"The show is also a great opportunity for producers to meet and talk with one another, to see what's working in each other's operations, converse over a coffee, learn what's going on in the industry, and hear the latest scuttlebutt."

Donauer says the trade show portion of the Expo is the place where those in the dairy and pork industry get to see the latest technology and equipment to make their operations more efficient, such as the latest electronic feeding systems.

For exhibitors such as feed companies or equipment manufacturers, it gives them a chance to spread their products around, touch different markets, and gain the exposure they need to be successful. "They get to be seen by a pretty big audience with one appearance," he stated.

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Another important part of the Expo is the educational component. School tours are being organized for grade five students to learn about various aspects of "Milk and Pork Production." Tour guides host the students, and qualified resource people conduct 15-minute presentations at five stations discussing the processing of milk and milk products, the milking parlour, the dairy cow's diet, nutritional aspects of dairy production, and pork production today.

"Last year, the Expo was scheduled over the Easter school break, and the school tours were really missed by everyone," Donauer said. "The tours are going to r..ume again this year, which we're all happy about."

Education will be a key focus for producers and industry stakeholders, as well. Three training seminars – a low-stress pig handling workshop, a Trucker Quality Assurance certification course for hog haulers and transporters, and an animal care assessment tool information session – will be offered over the course of the two days, with leading industry experts on hand to conduct presentations.

While there is a $75 registration fee for the pig handling workshop, the other two seminars are offered at no cost to participants.

The public may also be interested in taking in the various livestock shows and sales occurring throughout the event, involving dairy cattle in several different categories.

Public admittance to the 2007 Western Canadian Livestock Expo is free of charge.

For more information on the events surrounding the Expo, including how to book school tours for grade five classes, visit the Prairieland Park website at www.saskatoonex.com, or call toll free 1-888-931-9333.

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